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www.health.ri.gov

Interim Health Advisory

Date: August 12, 2009
To: All Institutions of Higher Education
From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH
Re: Guidance for Colleges and Universities

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has advised restraint from closing colleges and universities due to Probable or Confirmed cases of H1N1 virus. Instead, the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) recommends the following separation techniques for students who develop influenza-like illness (ILI), in accordance with protocols for community settings.

- Students who develop ILI (fever with either cough or sore throat) should stay home until they are free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Students who experience ILI and wish to seek medical care should contact their healthcare providers to report illness (by telephone or other remote means) before seeking care at a clinic, physician's office, or hospital. Students who have difficulty breathing or shortness of breath or are believed to be severely ill should seek immediate medical attention.
- If ill students **must** go into the community (e.g., to seek medical care) they should wear a face mask to reduce the risk of spreading the virus in the community when they cough, sneeze, talk or breathe. If a face mask is unavailable, ill students needing to go into the community should use a handkerchief or scarf (or similar cloth that would decrease the spread of droplets with coughing) to cover any coughing.
- Students remaining separated in their dorm/home should be given infection control instructions, including frequent hand washing with soap and water. Use alcohol-based hand gels (containing at least 60% alcohol) when soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty. See [Care of Individuals with Suspected or Confirmed H1N1 \(Swine\) Influenza Virus Infection](#) for more information.
- Roommates of students remaining separated also should follow infection control guidelines, including frequent hand washing with soap and water and use of alcohol-based hand gels (containing at least 60% alcohol) when soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty. See [Care of Individuals with Suspected or Confirmed H1N1 \(Swine\) Influenza Virus Infection](#) for more information.

Preventive Measures

Institutions of higher education can help protect the health of their staff and students by reinforcing the every day preventive actions that can be taken to prevent the spread of influenza: wash hands often; avoid sharing of food and drinks; cough into your elbow; stay home or away from others if you feel ill; and discourage shaking hands or kissing upon greeting.

Ongoing Recommendations

Additionally, HEALTH recommends that all colleges and universities:

- Have an effective Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP);
- Track visits to Health Services, using the RI Department of Health protocol for reporting;

- Regularly review updated daily briefs from the RI Department of Health, www.health.ri.gov;
- Provide strong, reinforcing messages to students, faculty, and staff about the basic preventive measures for disease control (see **Preventive Measures** section above);
- Inform anyone who has ILI symptoms to stay home and/or away from others;
- Have mechanisms in place for quick communication with students, families, faculty and staff;
- Have communicated to faculty that students who present to Health Services with ILI symptoms should have the opportunity to take final exams or complete work at a separate time and are not penalized for staying away from class or exam sites if they are ill;
- Consider establishing a hot line for easy access to information by students, families, faculty and staff;

There is likely to be a resurgence of the disease in the fall and winter. Make sure your plans are updated regularly. Be prepared to implement any appropriate elements of the plan when necessary throughout the coming year.

There is more detailed guidance for institutions of higher education at www.pandemicflu.gov/plan and click on the “School Planning” tab or go to www.cdc.gov.

For further information and daily updates, go to www.health.ri.gov.